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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides a brief overview of the Connecticut ninth-grade proficiency test by listing the skills to be assessed on the test. Sample questions exemplifying each skill are also included. Areas assessed include: (1) basic writing skills in the language arts (mechanics of written expression, composing and organizing skills, and library skills for writing tasks); (2) mathematics (addressing the broad categories of computation skills, mathematical concepts, and problem-solving); and (3) reading. The reading portion of the proficiency test (a new type of test called the "Degrees of Reading Power") is designed to measure a student's ability to process and understand nonfiction English prose passages written at different levels of difficulty or readability, identifying the hardest prose that a student can read with comprehension. A sample passage from the test is included. (JN)

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INTRODUCTION

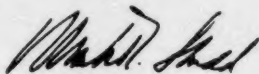
In 1978, with the passage of Public Law 78-194 (an act concerning Education Evaluation and Remedial Assistance—EERA), Connecticut joined the proficiency testing movement. This is a significant law, not simply because it calls for statewide testing, but because its emphasis is on remedial assistance.

A great deal must happen, however, between the passage of a law and its final implementation. And the efficacy of the law depends, in large measure, on the preparatory work done to implement it.

If the effort that has gone into preparing for EERA is any measure of its ultimate success, then I believe Connecticut will gain a great deal from its new law. Over the past 18 months, there has been considerable involvement of the education community in the development of the ninth-grade test—through hearings, committees, surveys and numerous workshops. The skills in this booklet reflect the broad level of participation and involvement that has characterized this new law.

This booklet offers a brief overview of the ninth-grade proficiency test. If you are a ninth-grade teacher, I strongly urge you to share these examples with your students.

Without the cooperation of so many people, EERA could easily have become just another state testing law, not able to live up to its promise of remedial assistance and program improvement. I feel confident, however, that we can expect EERA to succeed in its aim to improve schools and help students in the years ahead.



Mark R. Shedd
Commissioner of Education

BASIC WRITING SKILLS IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

Language is the basic substance of all language arts study. Literature is a specialized part of its content. The language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing (including spelling, handwriting, etc.)—are its tools. *All of these skills are very important.* However, given the constraints of statewide testing, it is impossible to include all skills on the proficiency examination. Since reading will be assessed in a separate test, the ninth-grade proficiency test of language skills will concentrate on writing. It will assess:

- (1) the writing experience itself;
- (2) related language skills, including:
 - mechanics of written expression,
 - composing and organizing skills,
 - library skills for writing tasks.

Accordingly, the test will consist of TWO parts:

- (1) an exercise requiring each student to write a passage based on personal experience;
- (2) 36 multiple-choice questions.

Students will not be asked to respond to isolated phrases or lists of words on the test. All words will be presented in the context of sentences or connected discourse.

Following is a list of the skills to be tested. The sample questions exemplifying each skill are similar to those which will be on the test.



MECHANICS OF WRITTEN EXPRESSION

1. Identify and obtain the meaning of a word in the context of a sentence and/or identify the meaning of a word containing a commonly used prefix or suffix.

Example:

He was not looking forward to the job of finding something in the misarranged files.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| A. arranged beforehand | C. badly arranged |
| B. partly arranged | D. arranged again |

2. Identify correct capitalization in a sentence.
3. Identify correct spelling for basic English words.

Example:

Use the passage below to answer the two questions that follow. The first question refers to the capitalization of the underlined words; the second question refers to the spelling of the words labeled A, B, C, and D in the passage below.

A.
Mary McLeod Bethune, the daughter of former slaves, began her
B.
career as a teacher. Later she founded and was president of Bethune-
C.
Cookman college in Florida. During this time, she was also active
D.
in national affairs and established the National Council of Negro
Women.

Which underlined word in the passage has a MISTAKE in capitalization?

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| A. slaves | C. college |
| B. president | D. Council |

Which word in the passage has a MISTAKE in spelling?

- | | |
|------|------|
| A. A | C. C |
| B. B | D. D |

4. Identify correct punctuation in a sentence.

Example:

Which line in the paragraph below contains a MISTAKE in punctuation?

- (1) On Wednesday, July 26, Ali saw an accident
- (2) occur while he was walking home from school.
- (3) Two cars came to an intersection at the
- (4) same time; and neither of the drivers stopped.

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| A. Line 1 | C. Line 3 |
| B. Line 2 | D. Line 4 |

5. In connected discourse, recognize and correct errors of usage and/or grammar.

Example:

Which sentence below contains a MISTAKE in grammar?

- A. The school trip was planned for Thursday.
- B. On Thursday morning, the sky was very cloudy.
- C. Joe and Sally wasn't sure they wanted to go.
- D. They were afraid that the weather would get worse.

COMPOSING AND ORGANIZING SKILLS

6. Identify language appropriate for writer's purpose and audience.
7. Identify appropriate sequence for arrangement of information and ideas.
8. Recognize and group related ideas to achieve unity in a passage.
 - a. Identify unrelated or contradictory ideas.
 - b. Identify detail to support generalizations.

Example: Use the passage below to answer the next three questions.

- (1) To the Editor:
- (2) Thank you for your paper's excellent article on our school's
- (3) Foreign Countries Festival. Many students, teachers, and parents
- (4) worked very hard to produce the Festival. It was an exciting event
- (5) for us all. Art students created the decorations.
- (6) To gather information on foreign countries, students from social
- (7) studies classes interviewed people who had lived in other parts of the
- (8) world. Students from wood shop made displays, and home economics
- (9) students prepared foreign dishes. I went to Mexico last year myself.
- (10) Your article, with the wonderful pictures related to it, was a
- (11) pleasant reward for all of those people who worked on the Festival.
- (12) Thanks a bunch,
Chris Lewison
- (13) Chris Lewison
- (14) Ninth-Grade President

Which numbered line contains language that does not fit with this type of letter?

- A. 2
- B. 6
- C. 8
- D. 12

Which numbered line contains information that is out of order, but should be included in the letter?

- A. 3
- B. 5
- C. 7
- D. 14

Which numbered line contains unnecessary information?

- A. 1
- B. 4
- C. 9
- D. 13

9. Identify and use appropriate transitions—both words and phrases—in written expression.

Example:

Read the sentence. Then choose the word that fits best in the blank.

They will probably be late _____ the weather gets any worse.

- A. but
- B. and
- C. if
- D. instead

LIBRARY SKILLS FOR WRITING TASKS

10. Demonstrate dictionary skills.

- a. Use dictionary guidewords to identify words found on a page.
- b. Use dictionary definitions to identify appropriate meanings for a word in context.

Examples:

- (a) Look at the two guidewords from a page of a dictionary. Then choose the word that would be between the two guidewords.

engineer . . . enlightenment

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| A. enjoy | C. engage |
| B. enemy | D. enough |

- (b) Choose the meaning that fits the underlined word as it is used in the sentence.

From a given dictionary page (which will be provided on the test), choose the meaning of the underlined word as it is used in this sentence.

The roof will not bear the weight of heavy snow.

11. Use reference materials to locate information for a given writing task.

Example:

Look at the index from an encyclopedia (which will be provided on the test). If you were writing a report on tobacco farming in Connecticut, which volume would be most helpful?



MATHEMATICS

The following objectives or skills are intended to represent a broad sample of mathematics skills and understandings. They attempt to address the broad categories of computation skills, concepts, and problem-solving. However, given the constraints of a one-hour examination, they are not meant to be, nor could they be, an exhaustive list of all mathematics topics taught prior to testing.

The examples that accompany each skill statement are intended to clarify the intent and approximate difficulty level of the skill.

These are only examples. The test itself will be composed of 65 test items designed to measure student achievement.

All items or test questions will be in multiple-choice format. To save space, the multiple-choice format is used below only where it is necessary for clarification.

1. Add whole numbers.

Example:

$$\begin{array}{r} 312 \\ 75 \\ + 185 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

2. Subtract whole numbers.

Example:

$$\begin{array}{r} 541 \\ - 337 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

3. Multiply whole numbers.

Example:

$$\begin{array}{r} 408 \\ \times 29 \\ \hline \end{array}$$



4. Divide whole numbers (without remainders).

Example: $15 \overline{)1725}$ or $606 \div 6$

5. Add fractions and/or mixed numbers.

Example: $2\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{3}{4} =$ or $\frac{1}{5} + \frac{2}{5} =$

6. Subtract fractions and/or mixed numbers.

Example: $2\frac{1}{2} - \frac{3}{4} =$ or $\frac{5}{8} - \frac{1}{4} =$

7. Multiply fractions and/or mixed numbers.

Example: $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{3}{4} =$ or $3 \times 2\frac{1}{2} =$

8. Divide fractions and/or mixed numbers.

Example: $6 \div \frac{1}{4} =$

9. Add decimal numbers.

Example: $3.47 + 1.16 =$

10. Subtract decimal numbers.

Example:
$$\begin{array}{r} 8.49 \\ - 3.62 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

11. Multiply decimal numbers.

Example:
$$\begin{array}{r} 35.6 \\ \times .5 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

12. Divide decimal numbers.

Example: $6 \overline{)12.36}$ or $1.2 \overline{)61.92}$

13. Find a percent of a given whole number.

Example: Find 40% of 80.

14. Find what percent one whole number is of another whole number.

Example: 6 is what percent of 30?

15. Convert fractions, decimals, and percents to equivalents.

Example: 0.3 is equal to what fraction?
or $\frac{1}{4}$ is equal to what percent?

16. Order unit fractions or decimal numbers.

Example: Which fraction is LEAST?

- A. $\frac{1}{3}$ B. $\frac{1}{2}$ C. $\frac{1}{8}$ D. $\frac{1}{4}$

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17. Identify the numeric form of a given whole number written in words.

Example: Which is equal to five thousand thirty?

- A. 530
B. 5,003
C. 5,030
D. 5,300

18. Identify the place value of a digit in a given number.

Example: What value does the 5 represent in the number 3052?

19. Name a ratio given two quantities.

Example: There are 5 boys and 10 girls in a class. What is the ratio of the number of boys to the number of girls?

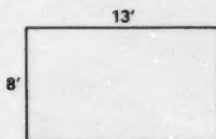
20. Recognize a given pair of lines as parallel, perpendicular, or intersecting.

Example: Which two streets appear to be parallel?



24. Find the area of a common geometric figure (circle, triangle, rectangle, square).

Example: Find the area of the rectangle below.



25. Solve for a variable in a given formula.

Example: Given the formula $F = M \times A$. If $M = 4$ and $A = 16$, find F .

26. Solve a problem involving a whole number.

Example: The New Cola company packed 960 bottles of cola into 40 cases. If each case held the same number of bottles, how many bottles were packed into each case?

27. Solve a problem involving fractions.

Example: New Haven had $16\frac{3}{4}$ inches of rainfall during the first half of the year and $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches during the second half of the year. How many inches of rain fell in New Haven over the entire year?

28. Solve a problem involving decimals.

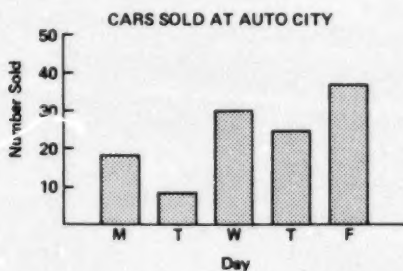
Example: Joan bought two steaks, one for \$3.45 and one for \$2.78. She paid for them with a \$10.00 bill. How much change should she receive?

29. Solve a problem involving percents.

Example: Carlos wants to buy a car that costs \$4,700. How much sales tax must he pay if the sales tax rate is 7%?

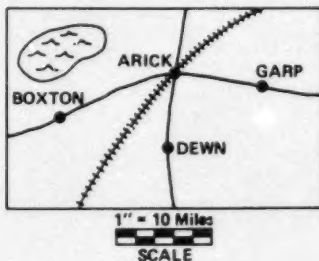
30. Read and interpret a table, chart, or graph.

Example: How many cars were sold at Auto City on Wednesday?



31. Read and interpret a map drawn to scale.

Example: According to the scale, about how far is it from Boxtton to Garp?



32. Find equivalent linear measures (English or metric).

Example: Jake's driveway is 39 feet long. How long is it in yards?

33. Find equivalent measures of weight (mass) and capacity (English or metric).

Example: A book that weighs $\frac{1}{2}$ kilogram weighs how many grams?

34. Solve a problem involving time.

Example: Jean worked from 8:30 A.M. to 4:45 P.M., with one hour off for lunch. How many hours did she work?

35. Find the average of a set of whole numbers.

Example: In their first five games the Highland basketball team scored 43, 62, 51, 70, and 54 points. What was their average number of points per game?

36. Approximate a reasonable answer to a given problem.

Example: Marcy drove 97 miles to Carlton at an average speed of 52 mph. About how many hours did the trip take?

A. 2 hours

C. 6 hours

B. 4 hours

D. 8 hours

37. Identify the correct number sentence to solve a problem.

Example: Each box contains 12 cans. Which number sentence should be used to find the number of cans in 24 boxes?

A. $24 \times 12 = \square$

C. $24 \div 12 = \square$

B. $24 - 12 = \square$

D. $24 + 12 = \square$



READING

The reading portion of the proficiency test will be a new type of test called the "Degrees of Reading Power." The test is designed to measure a student's ability to process and understand nonfiction English prose passages written at different levels of difficulty or readability. The test identifies the hardest prose that a student can read with comprehension.

The test measures a student's reading ability on an "absolute" scale. Just as a person's height and weight can be measured accurately without reference to how tall or heavy any other person is, so can reading ability be measured by determining on the prose difficulty scale the hardest text that can be read with comprehension.

The test consists of nonfiction prose passages on a variety of topics. Each passage contains about 300 words. The passages are arranged in order of difficulty, beginning with very easy material and progressing to very difficult material. Test items are formed by the deletion of selected words in each passage. Each deleted word is indicated by an underlined blank space. Five response options are provided to the students for completing the blank.

The items are designed so that the text of the passage must be read and understood. All the response options "fit" the blank space: each one makes a grammatically correct and logically plausible sentence if the sentence is considered in isolation. However, only one response "fits" or is plausible when the surrounding context of the passage is considered. Therefore, to determine the right answer, students must understand the text surrounding the sentence. If the text is understood, then the one correct answer will be obvious.

The deleted words and the response options are always "easy" or "common" words, no matter how difficult the passage. Thus the test items become more difficult only with respect to the difficulty of the text in the passages. The response options are kept at an easy level in order to assure that answering



questions correctly depends on understanding the surrounding prose in the passage. In addition, all the information that is needed to answer the questions is provided in the text of the passages, thus making it more certain that the test measures reading ability, and not prior information that some students may have and others may not.

Since a student's score on the test is an indication of the most difficult prose reading material which that student can comprehend, the information can be used by teachers to select materials for instruction and independent reading assignments which are of an appropriate difficulty level for that student.

A sample passage from the "Degrees of Reading Power" test is provided below.

Before anesthetics were discovered, surgery was carried out under very severe time restrictions. Patients were awake, tossing and screaming in terrible pain. Surgeons were forced to hurry in order to constrain suffering and minimize shock. 1 was essential. Haste, however, did not make for good outcomes in surgery. No surprise, then, that the 2 were often poor.

The discovery of anesthetics happened, in part, by accident. During the early 1800's, nitrous oxide and ether were used for entertainment. At "ether frolics" in theaters, volunteers would breathe these gasses, become light-headed, and run around the stage laughing and dancing. By chance, a Connecticut dentist saw such a 3. One volunteer banged his leg against a sharp edge. But he did not 4. He paid no attention to his wound, as though he felt nothing. This gave the dentist the idea of using gas to kill pain.

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 1 | a) Blood | b) Silence |
| | c) Speed | d) Water |
| | e) Money | |
| 2 | a) quarters | b) teeth |
| | c) results | d) materials |
| 3 | a) show | b) machine |
| | c) face | d) source |
| | e) growth | |
| 4 | a) dream | b) recover |
| | c) succeed | d) agree |
| | e) notice | |

At first, using the "open drip method," ether and chloroform were filtered through a cotton pad placed over the mouth and nose. This direct dose was difficult to regulate and irritating to the nose and throat. Patients would hold their breath, cough, or gag. This made it impossible for them to relax, let alone sleep. Consequently, surgery was often _____ 5 _____. It couldn't begin until the patient had quieted and the anesthesia had taken hold.

- 5 a) delayed b) required
c) blamed d) observed
e) repeated

Today's procedures are safer and more accurate. In the "closed method" a fixed amount of gas is released from sealed bottles into an inhalator bag when the patient exhales. He inhales this gas through tubes with his next breath. In this way the gas is _____ 6 _____. The system carefully regulates how much gas reaches the patient.

- 6 a) heated b) controlled
c) cleaned d) selected
e) wasted

For dentistry and minor operations, patients need not be asleep. Newer anesthetics can be used which deaden nerves only in the affected part of the body. These _____ 7 _____ anesthetics offer several advantages. For instance, since the anesthesia is fairly light and patients remain awake, they can cooperate with their doctors.

- 7 a) local b) natural
c) ancient d) heavy
e) three

